

# SUCCESSOR-RELATED FACTORS OF EFFECTIVE INTRA-FAMILY SUCCESSION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** Successor-related factors are among the most discussed topic in family firm succession. The purpose of this study is to explore successor-related factors associated with effective intra-family succession among successors. A total of 10 individuals participated in the study. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), four themes emerged from participants' personal statements and experiences: 1) autonomous motivation to take over family firm; 2) intense relationship between predecessor and successor; 3) personality traits; and 4) shared vision. The findings indicate that autonomous motivation to take over the family firm leads to effective intra-family succession since successor's passion aligns with family firms' needs. The intense relationship between predecessor and successor leads to effective intra-family succession in a way an open communication does exist. The smooth transfer of shared vision from predecessor to successor leads to effective intra-family succession. The interesting finding is younger successor differs from elderly successors in perceiving shared vision. Younger successors emphasize on individual motives, while elder successors emphasize on social motives. This work provides deeper insight related to successor-related factors, which leads to effective intra-family succession. In the future, it will be important to explore the potential use of a generational cohort concept in exploring successor-related factor in intra-family succession.



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Intra-family succession has been widely discussed by many family business scholars such as Chrisman, Chua, and Sharma (1998, 2003); Dyck et al., (2002); Le Breton-Miller, et al., (2004); Wang et al., (2004); Brockhaus, (2004); Venter et al., (2005); De Massis et al., (2008); Royer et al., (2008); Pyromalis et al., (2009); Bocatto et al., (2010); Sardeshmukh & Corbett, (2011); Zellweger

et al., (2011); Barnett et al., (2012). Intra-family succession defined as the process by which management and ownership of a firm are transferred from one generation to another in the same family firm. Based on the recent facts, only 30% of companies have been successfully passed on by founder to the second generation (Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership & Babson College, 2002). Furthermore, only 12% were successfully passed on to the third generation, and only 4% were successfully passed on to the fourth generation (Ibrahim et al., 2001; Davis and Harveston, 1998; Kets de Vries, 1993; Ward, 1987; Birley, 1986). It shows that intra-family succession is a global challenge for family firms. The main cause most frequently revealed is the immature of the intra-family succession plan (Poza, 2014; Miller et al., 2003), which is often associated with factors related to successors as those who will receive the leadership baton from predecessors.

According to Venter et al (2005), the attributes associated with successors that determine the effectiveness of the succession process consist of the willingness to take over the business, the level of readiness of the successor, and the relationship between the predecessor and the successor. Stavrou (1999) founded that there is a positive relationship between the size of the business and the successor's willingness to take over the family firm. The bigger the firm, the more willing successors to join the firm. Furthermore, Sharma (2003) also stated that the successor's willingness to take over could be measured by high level of confidence in running a business and strong willingness to take over the firm.

Actors of succession are not only involving successors but also predecessors. It is necessary to strengthen the relationship between these two actors. The relationship between them has a significantly positive effect on the satisfaction of the succession process, which is characterized by conducive and supportive environment, strong cooperation, and desired exchange information (Venter et al., 2005). Another study reveals other factors, including age (Marosi & Katona, 2015), health conditions (Naquib & Jamali, 2015), personality traits (De

Massis et al., 2008), human and social capital (Venter et al., 2005 and Cadieux, 2007).

Effective succession can be achieved if the successor is willing and able to run the firm as a chief executive officer, while predecessor feels comfortable and satisfied with his/her progress and intends to release his/her control over the firm slowly, thus prepare the retirement stage (Frese, 2015). A broad definition developed by Sharma (2004) through a framework that considers an effective succession as marked by two dimensions of success namely emotionally success as a family and financial success as a business. The challenge of achieving effective intra-family succession is how to attract next generations to join the business even though they believe that they have employed successor nurturing and development at the early phase. Such conditions refer to the willing successor problem that needs to be addressed comprehensively. Therefore, we need a study that explores in depth any factors related to successors that can induce them to be committed to an effective intra-family succession.

This study extends the concept of the succession process in the family business theory. Most of family business scholar agrees upon succession definition as transfer of management and/ or ownership from one family member to another member (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004; Sharma et al., 2001). Specifically, this study deepens the existing literature on the various successor-related factors that can influence succession by exploring successors' lived experiences. The empirical findings reveal substantive themes that become factors, if managed properly, can secure the effective of intra-family succession. Moreover, most studies on intra-family succession take the point of view of the predecessor, so the use of the successor's point of view is relatively limited (Marisetty et al., 2008). Based on this gap, we need a study that aims to explore factors related to successor associated with efforts to achieve effective intra-family succession. To answer that research problem, the main question of this study is "what attributes that could lead intra-family successors to achieve effective intra-family succession" based on their lived experiences.

**METHOD**

**Design**

Prior studies indicated that a qualitative approach seems to be the most appropriate to explore lived experiences (Manning, 2013; Humphreys, 2013; Hytti, Stenholm & Peura, 2011). For this study, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed for detailed structural analysis of the interviews, as it aims to explore meanings of particular experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). That devotes to the purpose of this study, which is to explore successor-related factors of intra-family succession.

**Participants**

The purposeful criterion sampling strategy was applied to this study, as suggested by Patton (2002), as it helps researchers to have valid interpretations of each case and understand certain social phenom-

enon of participants' lived experiences. The criteria for participants consist of two parts, namely the criteria for successor and the criteria for firm. As for the successor, they had or were about to experience generational transition and occupied as family-owner-manager. While the firm criteria are as follow (a) classified as large scale business (according to Bank Indonesia); with total employment of more than 300 employees; total assets of more than 10 billion rupiahs; total turnover of more than 50 billion rupiahs; (b) had superior performance both before and after succession; (c) had an active-predecessor. A total of 10 individuals participated (6 men and 4 women), with age range 27-44 years. Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of participants. A pseudonym is applied to protect participants' privacy. Information related to participants' gender, year of birth, position, birth order, and industry are available. All of participants are siblings from three different family firms.

**Table 1 Demographic characteristic of participants**

CODE	NAME	GENDER	BORN	POSITION	STATUS	INDUSTRY
P1	Iban	Man	1980	President Director	1 <sup>st</sup> child	Shipping & Logistics
P2	Mulya	Man	1984	Deputy Head	2 <sup>nd</sup> child	Shipping & Logistics
P3	Jaya	Man	1987	CEO	1 <sup>st</sup> child	Health Services
P4	Anto	Man	1990	CEO	2 <sup>nd</sup> child	Real estate
P5	Celli	Woman	1992	CEO	3 <sup>rd</sup> child	Hospitality
P6	Rahman	Man	1979	CEO	1 <sup>st</sup> child	Cosmetics
P7	Salim	Man	1980	CMO	2 <sup>nd</sup> child	Cosmetics
P8	Risa	Woman	1983	R&D Director	3 <sup>rd</sup> child	Cosmetics
P9	Sevi	Woman	1975	CFO & CEO	2 <sup>nd</sup> child	Construction
P10	Bitu	Woman	1988	General Manager	3 <sup>rd</sup> child	Hotels

Source: Interview with participants

**Procedure for recruitment of participants**

We contacted the parent of each participant since we have already known them from the previous study. We met them to ask permission to contact their children as participant of the study further. We also interviewed them to get better understanding of their children's aspirations regarding intra-family succession. We did the same way to recruit another participant.

**Data collection**

We used a semi-structured in-depth interview to capture successor-related factors of intra-family succession. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 min. We developed an interview guide to ascertain the research question. To elicit rich emerging themes, the following specific open-ended questions were asked: "Why do you decide to take over the family firm?" and "What attributes that you think

will influence the effectiveness of intra-family succession?”. By having permission from participants, all interviews were recorded using smartphone audio-recording and transcribed verbatim. To explore study context in an in-depth manner, it took us about 17 months to collect the data from 16 interview sessions, which last for 20 hours in total.

### Data analysis

This study compiled the six steps of data analysis presented by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) and Kahija (2017). The detail explanation of each steps is as follows.

*Reading and rereading:* Subsequently producing verbatim of each transcript, we read and reread them thoroughly to interpret and explore participants’ experiences.

*Initial noting:* Initial noting is conducted on each transcript. The initial notes were added to the left/ right side of margin in the transcript.

*Developing emergent themes:* Based on the initial notes, we focused on developing themes by comparing and contrasting the patterns and connections between notes.

*Constructing superordinate themes:* With the emergent themes, we constructed by clustering connected themes in a meaningful way and created superordinate themes.

*Searching for connection among cases:* We constantly compared themes of each transcript with those of other cases.

*Structuring all superordinate themes:* Some themes emerge from all participants, some participants, or only one participant. Therefore, we need to organize all themes that show the process of connecting the participant to a particular theme.

### Trustworthiness in qualitative research

We strived to meet the validity criteria of the data to strengthen the reports. Strategies were mem-

ber checking and expert review. As to member checking, we complied with the guideline proposed by Peterson, Papes, and Eaton (2007) as each participant was given a chance to rate his or her satisfaction with the interpretation and data analysis. All of participants mandatorily are asked to participate in that process, and they found our interpretation and overall themes are satisfactory. While for expert review, each reviewer is research supervisors in which the study was taken. They armed with their expertise in qualitative research. Thus, it helps to increase the credibility of qualitative data by reducing interviewees’ personal bias.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As illustrated by Figure 1, four main themes emerged from participants’ statements and experiences autonomous motivation to take over family firm, intense relationship between predecessor and successor, personality traits, and shared a vision. These were further subdivided into the subthemes of passion alignment, value driven, business interest, open communication, mutual trust, personal type, interpersonal type, social orientation, and individual orientation. These themes highlight that successor-related factors are among the most, which could lead to effective intra-family succession Excerpts from participants were extracted from the transcript of the interview where appropriate and compared with published literature in the context of family firm.

### Autonomous motivation to take over the family firm

Most of the participants decide to join the company because of the encouragement from within or autonomous motivation. They were likely getting “a call” because of their passion for becoming an expert in the occupied field and by chance that passion is in accordance with the needs of the firm. Such initial intention made them voluntarily join forces to contribute. Also, predecessor has struggled in shaping both firm and family values to appeal successors to join the firm. For example, Salim (man, 39) with the following statement.

“I joined the company because of my in-

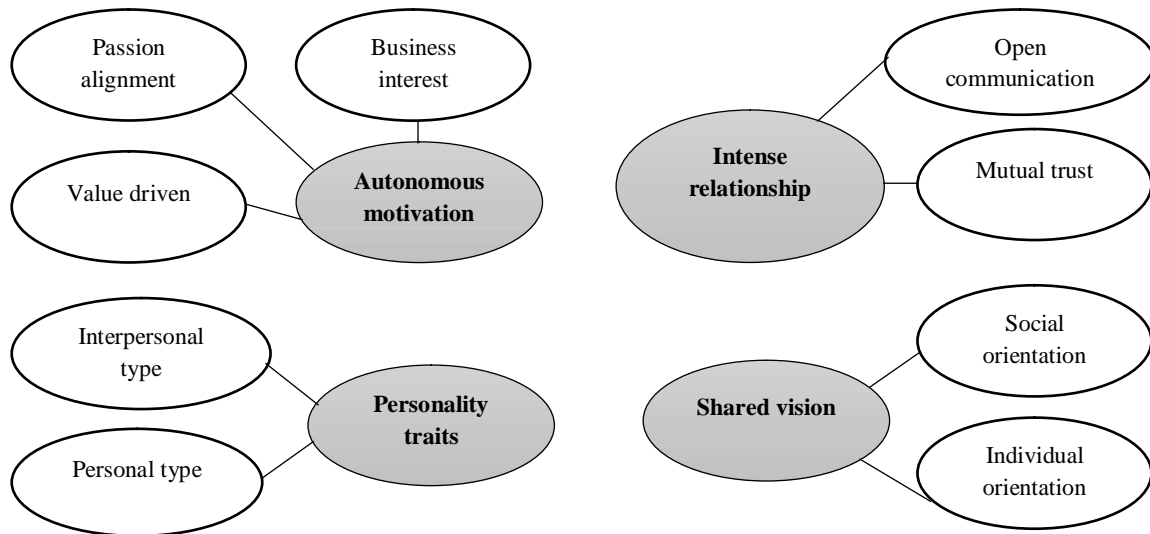


Figure 1 A map of emerging themes and subthemes

ner calling since I want to be an expert in marketing. My passion aligns with the firm’s needs. Also, I feel comfortable with the company culture and values”. (Salim, P7, pp. 28-36)

The same interest and strong feelings related to business between successor and predecessor make successors like Iban (man, 39) feels confident to take over the family firm. At the age of 20, he has joined the firm as an apprentice, and he has always been interested in his grandfather’s doing. Another participant, Jaya (man, 32) reveals that his parents initially drive the decision to join the firm since his childhood. As he grew up armed with formal education and apprenticeship experience, a passion emerged that turned out to be aligned with what was needed by the family firm. Such passion alignment is what increasingly solidifies its steps to become a successor. Here is his expression.

“I try my best, I don’t want to just mess up, I don’t even want to burden them. That’s what I feel emotionally. I feel that this career is really my passion which I want to do it 100%. I want to do it wholeheartedly”. (Jaya, P3, pp. 108-111 )

It goes the same way for Rahman (man, 39), who discloses that his decision to join the firm was initially directed by his father since he is the first child of the family. He is such a role model for his brother and sister. His involvement in the firm will make his younger siblings are interested in following his steps by joining the firm. He said, “Now that I see this company is getting bigger when the first time my father asked me to join the company. He’s kind of need help, I thought”. (Rahman, P6, pp. 43-44).

All participants in this study feel that they are compelled to take over the family firm due to the desire within themselves or autonomous motivation. The impetus comes from values (value-driven), the strong feeling to achieve the desired career or aspirations (passion-driven), and an interest in the business. Referring to SDT (Self-Determination Theory) by Deci & Ryan (1985) and Ryan & Deci (2002) the need for values of usefulness for the community in this study is in accordance with the terminology of need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002); the need for passion in this study is related to the need of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2002), and the interest in business is related to the need for autonomy (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2002).

### **Intense relationship between successor and predecessor**

An intense relationship between successor and predecessor is considered more dominant to influence the effectiveness of intra-family succession compared to various methods of successor nurturing and development carried out by the predecessor. Almost all participants have a strong, intense, and warm relationship with a predecessor that causes effective intra-family succession.

Salim perceived his relationship with his parents is intense and very fluid, which is derived from open communication and mutual trust. Although predecessor's leadership style tends to be collective with less formal rules, every successor is aware of his or her role in a professional manner so that the relationship between two actors is intense and warm. Here are the full details.

“As this company is in the second generation, the leadership style tends to be collective. The relationship between actors is very fluid enhanced by mutual trust. Me-my mother-my elder brother, as well as those who are here later, he seems do the odd job but in professional manner”. (Salim, P7, pp. 19-23 )

Sevi (woman, 44) believes that the relationship between two actors in a family firm tends to be stronger than non-family firms. Working relationship in a family firm is strongly inspired by the founder's values, while non-family firm is more of an aggregate professional nature like a superior-subordinate working relationship. The following is the explanation.

“All matters related to the business are discussed and decided together with the founder. That is the uniqueness of the family firm. Joint decisions are made to foster mutual commitment” (Sevi, P9, pp. 88-90)

All participants in this study have similarities in interpreting the relationship between predecessor and successor. An intense and warm relationship is the key to effective intra-family succession. Such a

relationship stems from open communication and mutual trust that boost the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge from predecessors as a source of knowledge and experience to successors who receive knowledge and experience related to business. Cabrera-Suárez et al. (2001) emphasize the importance of the relationship between successors and predecessors since it supports the process of knowledge transfer over generations in family firm which leads to effective intra-family succession.

The finding of this study is also supported by Venter et al (2005) which states that the relationship between predecessors and successors based on family harmony becomes one of the attributes that determine the effectiveness of intra-family succession, in addition to the successor's willingness to take over and the level of successor preparation in business. The relationship between successor-predecessor is one of four soft skills that must be owned by individuals in a family firm (Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014).

### **Personality traits**

Successor personality traits are believed to have contributed to determining how the intra-family succession works. Participants have unique personality traits that can distinguish them from other participants. The nature of personality can often be measured by the needs of the successor who wants to be fulfilled. The needs that emerge in most participants are related to psychological needs such as the need for achievement or competence, the need to interact socially, and the need to achieve independence in terms of self-existence.

For example, Mulya (man, 35), he needs achievement in a way he wants to prove his success of the mandate he has in running the family firm. He also reveals that the way of thinking must be flexible and brave, especially he is in charge of strategic business unit. He said “The point is we should not think too rigid, yet we must be brave. I am in charge of a unit that matches my experience. They give me full authority and responsibility to address the problem”. (Mulya, P2, pp. 344-347)

Bitita (woman, 31) interprets the mandate that she entails as a successor as a responsibility of

leader. Therefore, she tries to solve every problem with her strength. Although she was relatively young when she joined the firm, she improved her skill by learning a lot from reading books or asking a competent people. The following is the explanation.

“Since my father had a lot of things that must be resolved, I’d rather solve the problem myself. Thus, it also nourishes my maturity”. (Bita, P10, pp. 177)

Jaya (man, 32) needs affiliation or relationships and associating with others, especially with fellow family members. His parents initiate his sense of business ownership to develop the business. According to him, such needs should be nurtured by both parents. Here are the excerpts.

“ If we feel that our company does not need us, why am I here? I’d rather find an IT business with my friends. But because there is a sense of, uh, we need you here to develop what I have been built. Well, I think that kind of feeling is important”. (Jaya, P3, pp. 192-195 )

Celli (woman, 27) has slightly different characteristics from her two elder siblings, where she is more relaxed and less aggressive in doing business. As a successor, she assumes the role of balancing her father’s aggressiveness when executing business ideas. Therefore, she tends to take a moderate level of risk (risk averse), while her father is more willing to take risks (risk takers). Here are the excerpts “Since my father is somehow aggressive. Now with the children support him, we are trying to “tight the brakes”. The three of us are not conservative, but we tend to be moderate”. (Celli, P5, pp. 224-230)

In this study, most participants show sense of self-esteem, full of enthusiasm, creative, but less empathetic and less willing to take risks. Such personality traits lead to personality types. Yet, there are a small number of successors who tend to be easy to get along with, good at negotiating, and easy to empathize with others so that it leads to interpersonal personality types. This finding is in line with previous research, which states that personality types

are dominated by sense of self-esteem (Venter et al., 2005) and capacity for further development (De Massis et al., 2008). Whereas interpersonal personality types are dominated by the ability to establish networks (Steier, 2001) and decision-making skills (De Massis et al., 2008). Therefore, the personality traits of successors in this study lead to the dominance of two personality types, namely personal and interpersonal. The ideal conditions happen when the successor can put himself harmoniously with the situation where the succession process occurs so that it will lead to effective succession.

### **Shared vision**

Vision is defined as a long-term goal to be achieved in terms of as an individual and as a firm. This vision also underlies every individual in the company should behave. Salim, with his simple lifestyle, tends to be such a humble person as a result of his parents’ child rearing practice. Salim is taught to have a high level of social orientation. The company was founded to be able to bring best benefits to the environment and society. Here are the excerpts.

“My parents have repeatedly stressed that all these gains are not for the family, but for the community. Give the best possible benefit to the community”. (Salim, P7, pp.168-171)

The founder’s figure has so much inspired Iban concerning his strong vision of nationalism. As a figure of negotiation during the revolutionary period, his grandfather was very determined to fight for Indonesia’s independence and sovereignty in the international arena. Therefore, the spirit of nationalism is boldly embedded in Iban’s spirit while raising the business. It reveals in his statement as follows.

“I knew he was very proud to say, it’s okay if the company was no longer ours, but we have built a national level bank, though we only had minority shares. The most important is our company can contribute to Indonesia”. (Iban, P1, pp. 400-404)

Unlike the case of Risa with her age, which tends to be younger than other participants, she interpreted shared vision as meaningfulness. Armed with the knowledge of the medical field she has, she hopes to create products that can overcome skin problems at an affordable price. The vision tends to be related to individual achievement who can have an impact on business sustainability. The following is the explanation.

“Both my parents advised me that we have to work for the benefit of many people. Thus, my goal now is that with global standard R&D, we can produce products that solve skin problems at affordable prices”. (Risa, P8, pp. 109-112 )

The same feeling is also experienced by Anto, who thinks that the shared values taught by his parents are related to the meaning of success. He wants to achieve success as a businessman like his father and his idol in business. He does not expect compensation financially. He is rather expected more recognition from others. Such vision relates to individual motives. He said “I want to be successful. I think I’m not that materialistic, but I want to be known as a successful person. I’ll carve my name upon it” (Anto, P4, pp. 89-92)

To support sustainable active commitment, parent-founder and child-successor must hold on to a shared vision because with the aspirations of both parties, between senior and junior generation intertwined each other, they will be able to reach a shared vision (Lansberg, 1999). There is an interesting thing where the shared vision of elder successor (aged 34 to 44 years old) tends to be socially and spiritually oriented. While younger successors (aged 27 to 33 years old) tend to focus on individual achievement as their common goal, this is due to the concept of generation cohort that distinguishes the two age groups, where the elder successors who are the Xers cohort are more concerned with social orientation, while the younger successors belonging to the millennial cohort are more concerned with individual orientation. That is in line with the latest findings related to a generation cohort study from Parry and Urwin (2011).

This study sought to explore the successor-related factors associated with effective intra-family succession among intra-family successors. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that autonomous motivation to take over the family firm, intense relationship between predecessor and successor, personality traits, and shared vision seems to be factors that lead successor to commit to the effort of effective intra-family succession. The findings of this study are somewhat aligned with that of previous studies in that through willing successors. It will substantively contribute to effective intra-family succession (Lansberg & Astrachan, 1994; Sharma, 2004; Stavrou, 1999; Venter et al., 2005).

The new theme that emerged which is different from that of previous study is shared vision. Barnett, Long, and Marler (2012) note the effects of shared family vision and systems of exchange on the procedural justice climate for nonfamily managers during family firm succession. Thus, this shared vision strategically or in the long run will contribute to the continuance of effective intra-family succession. Another interesting finding from this study is the tendency of the resulting factors is more related to willing successors rather than competent successor since the perspective used are from successors. The result will somewhat different if we take the perspective of predecessor who tends to be more weighted on competency aspect rather than motivational aspect. They tend to focus on successors’ hard and soft competency (Ahrens, Landmann, & Woywode, 2015) as successor-related factors that will contribute to the continuance of effective intra-family succession.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This study set out to explore successor-related factors that lead to effective intra-family succession. Four themes emerged from participants’ statements and experiences: autonomous motivations to take over the family firm, intense relationship between predecessor and successor, personal and interpersonal traits of personality, and individual and spiritual based shared vision. All of these themes



are among the most factors related to the effectiveness of intra-family succession perceived by participants.

To drive successor to have such autonomous motivation, predecessor should provide conducive environment which could align successor's passion and family firm's need. The intense relationship between predecessor and successor based-on open communication and mutual trust could lead to effective intra-family succession. Personality traits of successors that are innate and mostly coherence with their psychological needs also affect to effective of intra-family succession. At last, the smooth transfer of shared vision from predecessor to successor leads to effective intra-family succession. The interesting finding is younger generation successor differs from older generation in perceiving shared vision. Younger successors emphasize on individual motives, while elder successors emphasize on social and spiritual motives. These findings provide deeper insight related to successor-related factors, which lead to effective intra-family succession.

### Recommendations

Some limitations need to be noted regarding the present study. First, this study examined successor-related factors from the perspective of second generation successors of family firms. Other elder generation such as the third or fourth can pursue different perspectives regarding their benefits and obstacles being successors from multiple generations family firms. Future research may consider these older generation's successor as a comparison with recent findings. Second, recent findings did not consider the cohort generations among successors. While younger successors reported a different shared vision from elder successors, it would be helpful if future researchers examine how successor-related factors are related to different cohort generations.

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